

# It's all about the Airmen

***'We are not supporting this war, we are in this war'***

story by Staff Sgt. Matthew Bates, photos by Donna Perry

Gen. T. Michael Moseley cares about Airmen and the jobs they do for their country. I discovered this during a whirlwind tour with the chief of staff to bases in Iraq, Afghanistan and Kuwait in February.

It was great to get an invitation to accompany the chief, though I didn't know what to expect. It wasn't long before I realized this would be a very educational journey.

As we crossed the Atlantic on the plane ride over, a passenger asked the general why he'd planned this trip.

"I'll be stuck in Washington [D.C.] for Congressional hearings soon," he replied. "So, I wanted to take this opportunity to visit our deployed Airmen while I could."

This theme would remain constant throughout the trip. Because for General Moseley it's all about the Airmen. At each stop, there were the obligatory tours and meetings with base leaders and the typical meet-and-greet courtesies. But I could tell the general couldn't wait to meet Airmen. He was truly in his element mingling with Airmen or addressing them in groups ranging from a few dozen to a few thousand.

For example, at each stop he ate his meals with Airmen. The general would ask them about their jobs and families. And he gave them a chance to ask him questions or voice a concern or opinion. It was also when the general got candid answers to questions about the host of issues the Air Force faces. And he asked Airmen what they felt about the new physical training uniform and longer deployments. I could tell the general really valued the answers.

As he hit one base after another, and no matter the audience's size, General Moseley's message was the same: "You [Airmen] are my priority."

At the first stop, I took up my position at the rear of the crowd and waited patiently, along with several hundred Airmen, for the general to begin speaking. I didn't know what he was going to say, but I couldn't wait to hear it. Having spent the better part of a day on the plane with the four-star, I already knew enough to expect this speech to be a good one.

The general started by thanking the Airmen for their service and sacrifice. But it wasn't a hollow homage from an out-of-touch general just going through the motions. I sensed the heartfelt gratitude that was as sincere as it was fervent.

Then he launched into the heart of his speech. He outlined three priorities he felt were important to the Air Force: Continuing the war on terrorism, recapitalizing and modernizing the Air Force's aging fleet and ensuring a sound quality of life for Air Force people.

General Moseley said the Air Force is the most feared and most

powerful component of the U.S. military and that each and every Airman should be proud to be a part of the service.

"Do you think Beijing worries about our Army or our Navy when they lie in their beds at night?" the general asked. "No, they worry about our Air Force — our fighters and our bombers — that can drop thousands of bombs right on their heads.

"That's the power of this Air Force, to strike fear into the hearts of our enemies before we ever have to engage them," he said.

Still, the war on terrorism is a different fight.

"I believe this is an existential fight," the general said. "We are in a fight to preserve our way of life against a group of radical people who would like to take that away from us."

This will not be an easy fight either, he said. It will take many more years to stabilize the region, and Airmen will be a part of the fight to the end.

For this reason, it's important for every Airman to be a competent, capable warfighter.

"We are not supporting this war, we are in this war," General Moseley said.

The general touched on deployment issues, including making 100 percent of the force deployment capable and ready and finding ways to limit the number of deployment short-falls due to medical concerns.

He also told Airmen how he plans to replace the Air Force's aging fleet of bombers, fighters and tankers.

"We can't continue to operate with aircraft that have been around since Korea and Vietnam," the general said.

Despite these limitations, he relayed his belief that the Air Force should never surrender its quality of life standards.

"The other services make fun of us for being treated so well," he said. "I'm OK with that. There's nothing wrong with taking care of your people."

Then he thanked the Airmen again, telling them he was going be-



***Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. T. Michael Moseley talks to several hundred Airmen in the auditorium at a base in Southwest Asia.***

I came to the conclusion that General Moseley really does care about Airmen. Not in that "it's-election-time-so-I-like-the-military" way so many of us are used to putting up with.

His message was clear: "You are the backbone of the world's finest air and space force, and I owe it to you to give you the best equipment, bases and standards possible."

The Air Force is in good hands — hands that care about where we are going, how we are getting there and how best to do both. ♡

fore Congress to fight to get what the Air Force needs.

It was a good speech. It was open, honest and direct — exactly what Airmen deployed to a combat zone should expect. I didn't feel the general said what he did because he thought it was what Airmen wanted to hear. I believe he meant every word.

During the rest of the trip, the general met thousands of Airmen, and I would hear his speech many more times. But every time he was passionate and sincere.

On my plane ride home to San Antonio, I thought about the trip, the places I visited, the people I met and of the opportunities I had to speak with the man who leads the world's most powerful air and space force.



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